

MEMO

DATE: October 4, 2007

TO: Community, Economic and Human Development Committee

FROM: Joseph Carreras, Program Manager, 213-236-1856, Carreras@scag.ca.gov

SUBJECT: Opinion article on Transit Oriented Development (TOD) to the Editor of the LA Times

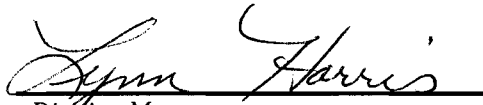
BACKGROUND:

In response to the CEHD Committee direction, an opinion article was drafted that generally discusses the importance of transit as part of a sustainable vision for Southern California's future development.

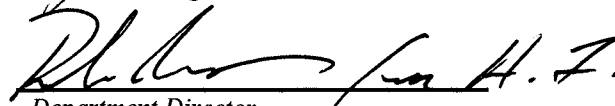
FISCAL IMPACT:

None


Reviewed by:


Lynn Harris
Division Manager

Reviewed by:


H. F.
Department Director

Reviewed by:


Chief Financial Officer

Transit Must Be Part of Our Future Blueprint

By Gary Ovitt and Jon Edney

Many thousands of Southern Californians depend on bus and rail transit today, and still more will use it if it better serves their needs. The more we can do to encourage transit- and pedestrian-friendly developments in Southern California, the more it will pay dividends in terms of alleviating congestion on our roads, reducing air pollution and improving our overall quality of life.

Gaps in service and convenience are barriers to using the current transit network. However, we've already seen a marked increase in transit usage in recent years as gasoline prices have continually increased. With oil prices recently passing \$80 per barrel and expected to continue rising, transit will only become a more attractive alternative to driving alone as families seek to control the impact of energy prices on their budgets. Southern California's transit network can be improved in terms of its reach and ability to link residents with job centers as well as non-work destinations. The "tipping point" in favor of transit use or walking over using an automobile is elusive and changes with the needs of each consumer.

There are some who question whether efforts to encourage new residential and commercial development near transit will have a significant effect on transit use, particularly in Southern California, where convenient auto access to destinations of all kinds is prevalent. The challenge of assessing the performance of transit requires an evaluation of the mismatch of needs and services and its convenience for the public generally, commuters and multiple wage earner households and the non-work trips they generate. Will transit be able to provide enough connectivity to the majority of jobs in the region, as well as places people need to access as part of daily living? Will the future direction of our region be more favorably disposed by increased automobile usage or more reliance on transit? Will our population become more reliant on transit service as the baby boom generation retires? These are all important questions we must answer to determine the role of transit in Southern California's future.

Clearly, transit-oriented development is not a cure-all, but it can and should be an important part of the long-term strategy Southern California takes to address its chronic traffic challenges. Enhancing the utility and convenience of the transit system and promoting walkable, well designed neighborhoods is a compliment to our auto-oriented environment. It is not intended to replace it. In turn, local streets must support balanced transportation choices in the context of a larger multi-faceted transportation network serving vibrant public destinations, work places, civic centers and urban places that define the Southern California region.

If our ultimate goal is to create a more sustainable Southern California for future generations, then a Blueprint is needed to guide future development. The Southern California Association of Governments has put forward the "Compass Blueprint," a vision for Southern California's future designed to reduce auto emissions, congestion and fuel

consumption while providing alternatives to auto use, through a more compact and balanced approach to urban development. With more and more people living near the transit stations and stops, a tremendous potential exists to have it serve additional trip making needs. But much more needs to be done to realize this untapped potential by filling service gaps and making transit safe, comfortable and affordable and this is what is served by more high quality, transit oriented development – not less. Transit will never replace Southern California’s car culture, but it can most certainly be a viable, sustainable alternative that can help alter the landscape of the Southern California we leave to our children.

Gary Ovitt is a San Bernardino County Supervisor and President of the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the six-county, 187-city Southern California Region. Jon Edney is a Councilman from the City of El Centro and also serves as Chair of SCAG’s Community, Economic and Human Development Committee.